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Conversation in a primary classroom: perspectives, practices and dilemmas

Presented by

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Introduction

Children learning English as an additional language in Australian primary classrooms face the twofold challenge of learning both the language itself, and simultaneously using it to learn the subject matter of the primary curriculum. In relation to oral language development, fluency in everyday social and procedural affairs comes relatively quickly (Cummins, 1996). Problems arise however if this initial development is not given further support as the children engage in progressively more demanding academic pursuits.

Teachers in multilingual classrooms therefore face the challenge of designing environments for learning that integrate on-going language development with the requirements of the various content syllabuses, in ways that include giving bilingual children a wider repertoire of talking opportunities. This challenge is made much more complicated when we factor in the diversity of backgrounds and experiences that exist in most classrooms. Nevertheless, it is important that bilingual children have the opportunity to engage with - to be exposed to and, crucially, to use (Swain, 1993; 1995; Toohey, 2000) - language that provides them with the additional linguistic material beyond their present ability. Providing support for this engagement is one of the central pedagogical roles for teachers in multilingual classrooms.

Classroom talk

Tharp and Gallimore (1991) note that while the 20th century has seen profound change, one area that has remained static has been the interaction between teachers and students. They refer to the dominant form of this interaction as "recitation" and it consists of:

The teacher assigning a text (in the form of a textbook or a lecture) followed by a series of teacher questions that require students to display their mastery of the material through convergent answers.

(1991, p.1)

This default pattern, as Cazden (1988) describes it, of teacher question ^ student response ^ teacher response (often evaluative in nature) has been noted for over one hundred and forty years (Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969) in both general education (Bellack et al., 1966; Barnes et al., 1969; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979 & 1998; Young, 1984, 1987, 1992 & 1997; Watson & Young, 1986; Wood, 1992; Renne, 1996; Pontecorvo, 1997; Wells, 1993; 1999b; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Nystrand et al., 2001; Hardman et al., 2003), and second

In a bleak description of the kinds of opportunities for classroom talk, Edwards and Westgate (1994) suggest that appropriate participation for classrooms, and this would include multilingual classrooms, requires of pupils that they:

- listen or appear to listen, often and at length. They have to know how to bid properly for the right to speak themselves, often in competitive circumstances where a balance has to be found between striving so zealously to attract attention that the teacher is irritated, and volunteering to answer so modestly that their bid is ignored. They have to accept that what they do manage to say in answer to a teacher's question will almost certainly be evaluated (if only by repetition), may well be interrupted if judged to be irrelevant to the teacher's purposes, and may be heavily modified and translated to fit the teacher's frame of reference as to be no longer recognisable as their own contribution at all. Since the teacher usually knows the right answer already, they learn to focus on the many clues and cues which the teacher provides to narrow the area of search within which that answer is to be found. Their task is to respond, rarely to initiate, and it is for the teacher to say what has 'really' been learned from the words, which have been exchanged.

(1994, p.40)

Central to this description is a pattern of which has variously been labelled as soliciting ^ responding ^ reacting (Bellack et al., 1966); Initiation ^ Response ^ Evaluation (Mehan, 1979); Initiation ^ Response ^ Feedback (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975); "triadic dialogue" (Lemke, 1985; 1990) while Wells (1999b) uses Follow-up as a description of the final move.

There has been considerable and ongoing concern expressed from a number of different perspectives of this tightly framed participation pattern. Wood (1992) for example, while not referring to the complete Initiation ^ Response ^ Follow-up (IRF) pattern, notes both the prevalence of questions in the Initiating move of the teacher, and the generally limited, or 'closed' form, such questions often take. In terms of question frequency there is little doubt that teachers do ask a lot of questions. Both Brock (1986) and Tollefson (1994), drawing upon a study by White and Lightbown (1984), cite the case of an ESL teacher who asked 427 questions in a 50-minute lesson while Dillon (1982), in a comprehensive review of questioning research, notes that "teachers traditionally ask an average of several and even many questions per minute" (p.152) which leads Kerry (1987) to estimate that over the course of a career a teacher is likely to ask one and a half million questions. Wood (1992) argues that modern day teaching-as-questioning, while having roots leading back to Socrates, and in spite of numerous training schemes based on various cognitive taxonomies (see Dillon, 1982, for a

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1 I have purposely included a number of works here to give some sense of the ongoing nature of this practice.
discussion) has nevertheless remained ineffectual as a means of increasing pupils' varied participation roles in lessons.

Talk initiatives
Against this backdrop of seemingly monolithic proportions, recent initiatives to make teaching more interactive and conversationally based (among other things) might appear somewhat quixotic. The Productive Pedagogy framework developed by the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (1999) and recent material published by the New South Wales Department (NSW) of Education and Training (2003) both emphasise the important role to be played by substantive conversations between teachers and pupils. According to the NSW material, this element of quality teaching is made operational in classrooms when “students are regularly engaged in sustained conversations about the concepts and ideas they are encountering” (New South Wales Department of Education and Training 2003, p.11). Such sustained engagement however has indeed turned out to be quite difficult to achieve. For example, in the Queensland sample of 975 teachers the score on a five point scale for substantive conversation, across the cohort, was 2.27, a score below the theoretical mean of 3 (Gore, J. et al., 2001).

Similarly, in recent policy-led initiatives such as the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in England, interaction is considered crucial in the effort to raise literacy standards, and pupils' contributions are to be “encouraged, expected and extended” (DfEE, 1998, p.8). If anything however, the reverse has occurred. It would appear that since the introduction of the NLS there has been an increase in the kind of whole-class teaching where the teacher is interactively dominant (Mroz et al., 2000; English et al., 2002) and that:

far from encouraging and extending pupil contributions to promote higher levels of interaction and cognitive engagement, the majority of the time teachers’ questions are closed and often require convergent factual answers and pupil display of (presumably) known information.

(Hardman et al., 2003, p.212)

In fact according to Galton et al. (1980; 1999) it would appear that in England, “today’s teachers devote even more of their time to telling pupils facts and ideas or to giving directions than their counterparts of twenty years ago” (1999, p.67). One possible reason for this is that the policy call for more interaction is coupled with a drive for “well-paced” lessons where there is a “sense of urgency, driven by the need to make progress and succeed” (DfEE, 1998, p.8). Other reasons may relate to the issue of time constraints in the classroom, and the demands of explicitly specified learning objectives. In such a context, according to English et al. (2002), teachers working within the NLS considered interactive teaching “as something of a luxury” (p. 21).

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2 In the NSW document the “substantive conversations” of the Queensland material has been changed to “substantive communication”
English as an additional language and a sociocultural perspective
Amidst all this talk about interaction and conversation sits the child learning English as an additional language in the multilingual classroom. Up until recently, research within the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) concerned itself with an individual's acquisition of discrete aspects of the language and employed the notion of input and output as a central organising metaphor (Swain, 1993, 1995; Long, 1996). Within this metaphor, language was seen to contain meanings which, when transmitted by speech or writing, could be 'emptied' into the mind-as-container of the recipient. Such a view saw input as merely a triggering mechanism (Van Lier, 1996, p.50) and largely ignored the child's role in active social and cognitive engagement with the task at hand. van Lier makes the point that:

It is this linear cause-effect view that needs to be replaced by a more complex view in which cognition, language, learning, and consciousness are in themselves dialogical constructs.

(1996, pg.50)

This sociocultural notion that learning is first and foremost a situated, interspsychological phenomenon, suggests that we pursue a social rather than a psychological theory of learning. Such a view has particular relevance for work in multilingual classrooms because as Lave points out, theories which:

reduce learning to individual mental capacity/activity in the last instance blame marginalised people for being marginal.

(1996, pg.149)

An emphasis on the social nature of learning though, requires that before (or as) we look closely at, say, a teacher talking to an individual child, or to a small group, or whole class, we widen our lens in such a way, as Rogoff points out, that includes:

the active and dynamic contributions from individuals, their social partners, and historical traditions and materials and their transformations.

(1995, p.140)

This widening of scope leads to the view that learning, rather than being a process of transmission and individual acquisition, is a situated practice (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1991) within a community of others (Lave, 1991; Rogoff, 1994; Wenger, 1998; Palinscar et al., 1998; Toohey, 2000) where the less experienced participants are engaged in a social, linguistic and cognitive apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990; 1991) and "constructive transformation" (Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993; Lave, 1996) through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) which sets up conditions for the appropriation (Rosebery et al., 1993) of the social world to restructure individual mental functioning (Berk & Winsler, 1995).
A second Vygotskyan-inspired sociocultural theme that has important implications for classroom talk is that human social and psychological processes are best understood by exploring the tools and signs used to mediate them (Wertsch, 1990). Vygotsky (1981) recognised and made a distinction between technical and symbolic tools. Technical tools, for example a hammer, are mediators of human influence on the surrounding environment (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The taking-up of higher psychological processes from the social and the appropriation to the individual plane however, is accomplished through the use of symbolic tools - the most important of which is language. Following from this, Vygotsky considered that the greatest change in child development occurs:

when socialised speech, previously addressed to the adult, is turned to himself, when, instead of appealing to the experimentalist with a plan for the solution of the problem, the child appeals to himself. In this latter case the speech, participating in the solution, from an inter-psychological category, now becomes an intra-psychological function.

(Vygotsky & Luria, 1994, pg. 119. Emphasis in the original)

The domain, or intellectual space, for this transference has been characterised by Vygotsky as the now well-known zone of proximal development (ZPD).

The practical outcome of this conception is that the Piagetian derived adage to teach 'where the child is at' is turned around. Rather than development leading learning, Vygotsky is arguing that learning must lead development. The challenge for teachers is to provide experiences and contingent instruction within the ZPD of the child. By definition these experiences need to be challenging and yet need to be supported in such a way that development occurs.

Sociocultural Pedagogy: Challenge, handover, engagement and assisted performance (CHEAP)

In relation to the classroom action I will describe, and from a sociocultural orientation to classroom learning and teaching, some working principles can be distilled sociocultural theory of mind that might guide an approach to conversations in the classroom. In the context of the work in our Year 3/4 multilingual class we first needed to provide a challenge for children. This challenge was frequently reflected in the topic chosen for conversation and the nature of the questions we asked. Second, we needed to engage children with ideas or activities in such a way that links were made to something they already knew and could bring to the conversation - their “funds of knowledge” (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) - and that there was intrinsic motivation to expand on these linkages. Third, this expansion process, which generally entailed a performance of some kind (talking, writing, manipulating and so on) was assisted to the extent that was needed.

Implicit in these inter-linked principles was the notion of ‘handover’ (van Lier, 2001). This can be read both literally and metaphorically. Literally, in the sense that we gave children the raw thinking material to work with, and metaphorically,
in a dialogic sense, as we made moves to relinquish sole control within interaction and move to a position of greater symmetry.

And so, with these socioculturally-derived principles in mind, the remainder of this paper will describe and comment upon attempts we made to move towards more open, dialogic practices. Our goal was to interact in such a way that pupils in this multilingual classroom were assisted to perform “a head taller” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102) themselves.

An orientation towards conversation

There were 29 children in this 3/4 class although this number varied occasionally as children came and went. There were 10 children in Grade 3 and 19 in Grade 4. Sixteen of the children came from backgrounds where English was not a first language. These language backgrounds included: Turkish, Bengali, Arabic, Hindi, Maltese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Indonesian and Vietnamese. The class was learning about the colonisation of Australia, a topic in the New South Wales Stage 2 Human Society and Its Environment syllabus. This is a challenging topic and our goal was to assist the children to engage with the complex and abstract historical issues connected to the ‘first contact’ between indigenous and colonising groups. Our first task was to develop a dialogic orientation.

In the first lesson of the Unit we investigated the voyage of the First Fleet on its journey to Australia. At the conclusion of that lesson, some questions about the journey (based initially on what we as teachers didn’t know) were considered and then left for all of us to think about over the coming weekend. In the next lesson, these questions were revisited. With the questions on a white-board, the class addressed the first one which was ‘Why did the First Fleet cross the Atlantic Ocean twice?’ Transcript 1 below is an extract from this early talk.

Transcript 1

1 Craig Um, I think, I’m not sure -
2 T Yeah
3 Craig But, um, they went double because it was a long trip down from Cape York to, um,
4 the other place -
5 T Right, from Tenerife to Cape of Good Hope
6 Craig so they, so they needed lots of supplies for the long trip.
7 T Okay, and we talked, the coast possibly was dangerous. [Rajiv has his hand up]
8 Rajiv? 9 Rajiv Um, probably, (…) like, there was like (…) that side. They, like, probably there was like…the weather conditions on that side was bad.
10 T Okay, that’s an interesting one. [Ali has his hand up] Ali?
11 Ali Well, maybe from Tenerife they got, like, fresh supplies and if they went to Cape

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3 The fleet left England and sailed first to Tenerife. From Tenerife the fleet then sailed to Rio de Janeiro. From Rio the fleet then re-crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the Cape of Good Hope.
of Good Hope they'll probably be like the same, um, supplies as Tenerife, so they
wanted to get like probably, um, different like kinds of food.
T Oh, okay, that's like what Luke was saying about specific kinds of food. Well, I've had
a look at -
Hassan I've got another one.
T I'll come back to you Hassan. I haven't tried to find out the answer to all these questions
over the weekend. The only one I could come up with was this one [pointing to first
question] and we'll come back and we'll talk about the answer to that one.
T What about this one? [pointing to the second question]
Hassan, did you have something to say about that?
Hassan I was gonna say give them counterfeit money.
Luke That's what (.....).
T Oh, yeah, yeah we talked about that last week. Erdem, [Erdem has his hand up]
Anything new?
Erdem Maybe, um, they had like money somewhere else where he used to live and
then just brought it from there -
Luke Okay
Erdem and he could pay for it.
T Okay, alright. [Fateema has her hand up] Fateema?
Fateema Maybe he traded things he didn't need.
T I didn't hear that, sorry.
Fateema Maybe he traded things he didn't need.
T Oh, okay. So maybe he, what he used for money was actually goods -
Liam Swords.
T maybe even services. Yeah, maybe he had extra swords or whatever.

At another point during this cycle of talk the one of the children contributes the fact that some of the convicts melted belt buckles to make coins. Khalida asks a question:

Transcript 2
1 Khalida How did they, how did the convicts melt the, um, belt buckles?
2 T Don't know. What do you reckon?
3 S (whispering classmate) A candle.
4 T It's an interesting one isn't it? See, that's something else we might need to find out. How
did they melt that and not get caught?
5 Luke I know!

*The second question asked how the British paid for the goods at their ports of call.*
You've got an idea?

Yeah, maybe, um, maybe, it's like, when, um, they come out to, like, when they come out to, um, look at the sea, he might, you know how there's a kind of like, torches?

Yeah

He might've hid the, a couple of belt buckles inside there and then the next day he might have gone out and taken them.

Yeah, that's an interesting point, because actually the, the metal that belt buckles were made of usually, I think, was lead, and lead is a very soft metal. So because it's soft it melts more easily than say steel or aluminium. So you don't need much heat to melt it. So you could've used flames like that.

The speculative nature of the exchange has given Khalida the space to ask a puzzling question. The response she receives is an honest one – “Don't know. What do you reckon?” – and reinforces a knowledge position that we wanted to introduce in this early dialogue with the class. Luke goes on to develop a theory which is then expanded upon at a more technical level (lines 14-17).

Another issue appears in Transcript 2 that we encountered on a number of occasions in the Unit. In line 3, one of the children, rather than putting their suggestion into the public domain, whispers it to a classmate. I will return to this issue later in the paper.

I have chosen to look at this particular episode of classroom talk because it is an example of talk, in the early part of the Unit, where certain ways of talking were employed, and an orientation to, in this case, factual knowledge was demonstrated. In considering this example of talk, some of the recurring themes we sought to weave into our future talks with the whole class begin to emerge. These include:

- Knowledge construction as a shared endeavour – teacher as co-inquirer;
- Provision of knowledge sources apart from the teacher to assist in answering historical questions;
- Provision of dialogic space for children to ask questions from this engagement and motivation;
- Provision of dialogic space for children to produce extended stretches of language;
- Publicly identifying points made by children;
- Publicly linking contributions made by the children;
- Reformulation of student responses to align more closely with the discourse in which the class are engaged.
Pursuing dialogue in whole class talk
As limiting as a reliance on traditional classroom interaction of the IRF kind might be, so too is it unrealistic (and indeed counter productive) to think that all whole class talk can be open, speculative, and ‘educated’ (Mercer, 1995) in nature. Our work in managing often quite large numbers of children; of balancing their varied physical, social, psychological, as well as academic needs; in conjunction with the demands of educational authorities and the expectations of parents and community alike, calls for a more balanced role for talk in this enterprise.

So far I have looked at an example of what might be seen as laying the ground work for productive talk contexts with the whole class. In this section I will look at how we embedded our action in relation to a more expanded role for talk in a multilingual classroom within a broader lesson context.

One of the suggested activities in the HSIE Syllabus is to produce a consequence chart that links a series of actions with accompanying reactions. In this sequence of whole class talk Liz, my co-teacher, is introducing a consequence chart for the first time. The goal here is to design a consequence chart for Pemulwuy, an Aboriginal warrior.

Lesson stage 1
The children had already previously suggested some possible reactions they would have had to an alien invasion and these had been listed on a white board that was now on the floor, leaning against the wall, in front of the children. On the board were the following: surrender; study/observe; make peace; fight/army; get away. Liz has asked if the children have any other suggestions to make.

Transcript 3
1  T  Ah, just one sec. I’m just wondering whether we could move into a circle because then
2  Kim I’d like you to see each other speaker [children move]
3  T  Miss what does surrender mean?
4  Kim Give up. It means to give up. You’ve got study them, observe them make peace fight
5  Aziz by making an army so this one’s in a group. Get away
6  T  study then kill them then you’ll know where to aim
7  Ali study then kill. Study then attack or study then kill?
8  Ben study then attack or study then kill
9  Fateema attack

interruption

10  Fateema Um it’s kind of like get away ... run for your life

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5 One decision we made in this respect was to have extended, whole class talk sessions of the kind I will describe shortly while Manh, a newly-arrived child from North Vietnam, was working with the ESL teacher along with other newly-arrived children in other classes. While we were able to include Manh in much of the Unit (including literacy tasks), especially with the assistance that Hai could provide, we were also conscious of Manh’s needs for more general language development work and Hai’s need for further English development need in the context of the topic.
As part of the larger lesson, this introductory stage is marked by a fairly free and open forum on what other possible reactions there might be. Sitting in a circle, with Liz kneeling on the floor next to the whiteboard, the class are in effect re-focussing for what is to follow. Most whole class talk (though not all) in this unit was carried out with the children in a circle with the teacher often sitting on the floor as well. The contributions made however still leave room for Liz to pursue a more technical reformulation of some of the contributions as can be seen in Transcript 4.

Transcript 4

1  Liam  Try to make contact with them I mean try to talk to them maybe
2   S    they can't talk
3   T    you mean maybe bigger than talk, communicate, sign language or something
4  Liam  yeah and try to find out what they're trying to find out
5   S    find out the cause
6  Liam  yeah
7   T    so I'll put communicate.

In line 1 Liam makes a suggestion to which a classmate responds with a counter claim which in turn is picked up by Liz and reformulated by introducing the more technical 'communicate'. The move here gives the floor back to Liam. He responds in agreement and accepting 'the floor' adds further information that is added to by a classmate. This element of the lesson ends with Liz summing up:

Transcript 5

1   T    OK now all of those are responses or reactions to a situation, aren't they? These are all reactions. Something someone comes to, something scares you like (....) or something
2
3  Lesson stage 2
Liz stands up, moves the whiteboard to one side and writing ‘Consequence Chart’ on the board says:

Transcript 6

1   T    Now what we’re going to look at today is a little bit about how did some of the really
well known Aboriginal people that we know about how did they react?

[writes consequence chart on blackboard]

Interruption

...the alien story OK let’s just practice one. Imagine that little bit of video that Mr Dufficy showed you with the aliens coming... we’re going to pick one of these reactions [pointing to whiteboard] to start our chart. Which reaction do you want to start with? Ben?

Ben OK um make peace

T OK [writes on blackboard] what might that look like? What are you going to do? It could be anything imagine that alien...that person who’s standing there looking at the aliens that’s what they want to do [pointing to chart] they want to have that reaction.

T Tell me what they might do first?

These endings and beginnings serve to both signal and orientate the children to the next task element. Once established, the ideas of the children begin to fill the spaces in between with Liz managing the contributions in order to construct the model consequence chart.

Transcript 7

1 T ah Khalida what could be a consequence?
2 Khalida um maybe they try again
3 T who tries again?
4 Khalida the aliens (.....)
5 T ah so you think...Khalida you think the aliens might get angry... what because that person’s run away?
6 Khalida yeah
7 T and you think that they might...
8 S oh I know
9 T they might go again
10 Khalida (.....)
11 T OK who has an idea that goes with Khalida’s... that builds on that? Salam?
12 Salam They keep them hostage
13 Hassan a hostage (.....)
14 T Oh so you think an alien might come and capture...
15 Salam yeah
16 T because they’re angry [teacher writes “aliens capture [symbol for woman]]
This model building exercise needs to be fairly tightly managed but at the same time there is little need for evaluative comment upon contributions because the responses of the children are novel in the sense that there is no preconceived answer. Part of Liz’s task here is to flesh out the suggestions for the other classmates as the suggestions are made. An example of this can be seen in line 5 where Liz both checks for clarification while at the same time expanding upon the contribution. To note also is the recurring pattern of publicly associating a contribution with a child’s name as happens in line 12.

Lesson stage 3
When the chart has been constructed by the class on the blackboard, Liz introduces a sheet which has been designed to assist the children in practising the design of a consequence chart for themselves. In this section of the lesson she has the floor and does the majority of the talk. The practice run will be done in pairs. On the sheet is a scenario that she will read through with the class, as well as a structure for the children to use as a guide for their consequence chart.

Transcript 8
1 T [pointing to board] This kind of thing where you’re thinking of the next, the reaction,
2 the action the reaction of two groups of people it’s called a consequence chart because
3 you’re seeing what would be the result of that action. How did it effect the next action
4 so it’s called a consequence chart so you’re going to have to...
5 do one like that now. What I’m going to get you to do for the first step [holding up pro-
6 forma and pointing] this is just like a practice to practise doing a consequence chart so
7 it’s got a scenario here at the top, and in pairs you’re going to...
8 these lines you can put little arrows between them to have a practice and then we’re
9 going to come back after five minutes or so - maybe I’ll give you ten minutes, and
10 we’ll share some of our reactions to that [the scenario] then we’ll see what was
11 Pemulwuy’s real reaction. We’ll look at his real life
12 Hassan who’s Pemulwuy?
13 T Pemulwuy is a warrior
14 Aziz yeah
15 T and we’ll see what his was. Now I’m going to read you this scenario and then you can
16 go off in pairs and read it again and have a practice And this is what it says [reads] “You 17 are a respected member of a tribe - you could be an elder woman an elder man it
18 doesn’t matter - you have heard of clay-faced men who have come on floating islands
to your land” What are floating islands?

Ben floating boats

S ships

T [continues reading] you have heard that they can kill people with long sticks

S thundersticks

Ss muskets

T [continues reading] you have seen other Aboriginal tribes people moving in on your land because they have been forced off their land by the clay-faced men - so you’ve heard about these clay-faced men but you’ve never seen them before.

T [continues reading] One day you meet a group of these clay-faced men camping on your land. What do you do? What do you think would happen as a result of your reaction?” [pointing to sheet] So first of all you read it and in your pairs you choose one of your reactions [pointing to original list on whiteboard] …it’s got to fit in with this scenario so it’s got to be something that fits. Choose a reaction and then to the consequences. OK you’ve got ten minutes. You can do it alone or in pairs I don’t mind.

Taking time out to build towards tasks was a common feature of our work in the class as we attempted build-in frameworks for assistance.

Lesson stage 4
When it came for the children to work in pairs, we again were very conscious of exploring different combinations of children so that their efforts might be assisted within the pair. In Transcript 9 below, Stacy and Lucia are working together. Stacy was at the time of this work going through a difficult time at home and was getting a lot of emotional support from Liz as she was often upset at school. She was nevertheless quite a courageous little girl and showed some of this courage in her talk during whole class work, offering contributions quite frequently. She was not a member of the more out-going group of girls in the class. Lucia, on the other hand, was a member of this group and during whole class talk would sit with this group which included Made, Fateema and Sian. Still, across all the transcripts of talk, Lucia’s voice is silent. We were interested in whether or not this pairing might prove beneficial to both children. In the following extract from their work together, they had got stuck in the task.

Transcript 9
1  T OK what’s the consequence of them using muskets or long firesticks
2  Lucia Um...
3 Stacy  ah they kill our leader
4 T  they kill your leader OK now what’s the consequence of them killing you’re leader?
5 Stacy  um we kill all their men
6 T  so you get angry and kill them is that right?
7 Stacy  kill one of their men
8 T  one of their men and what’s the consequence of killing one of their men?
9 Lucia  [laughing] um they kill one of our men
10 Stacy  no we can’t just have kill one, kill one, kill one we need something different maybe...
11 T  maybe they...they go away and come back with more men, more clay face
12 Stacy  maybe some of our men run and get their weapons
13 T  yep, what weapons do you think they might use?
14 Stacy  spears

There are no right answers to this task but logic is involved. Here, Stacy is the more engaged of the pair and I have intervened to try and move their thinking along the path of ‘action – reaction’ that Liz had set up. A common interactive move is in evidence in line 4 where I use repetition and then ask a question to extend the development of the scenario. This can also be seen in line 8. Lucia seemed almost embarrassed to engage in this kind of thinking and in line 10 Stacy good-naturedly keeps focus with the task. My suggestion in line 11 to Stacy’s hesitancy in line 10 is not picked up as Stacy makes an alternate suggestion in line 12. My next suggestion picks up on Stacy’s contribution and tries to extend it.

Lesson stage 5
Other pairings were more effective in their development of a consequence chart as can be seen in the next stage of the lesson where the children return to their circle at the front of the room and read back to their classmates their consequence chart. Liz asks for pairs to report back and Ali and Ben volunteer. Ali reads:

Transcript 10
2 Clayface people shoot bullets. Some men get killed. We throw our weapons.
3 The majority of Aboriginal weapons were designed primarily for throwing.
4 T  most of the clayface get killed. We go closer and attack more effectively.
5 Ali  yeah and shoot (….)
6 S  (…..)
7 T  ah so you look like you’re winning...
8 T  most of the clayface people get killed and then you come in closer and attack more effectively. Did you mean using a different kind of weapon?
9 Ali  yeah and shoot (….)
And a little later:

12 T One more, um, Maggie? [Maggie and Kim worked together. Maggie reads]

13 Maggie [reading] Go to the...

14 T Big voice

15 Maggie [reading] Go to the clayface people and plan for war. Clayface people, um, shot...oh no, clayface people get very angry and started shooting (....). My...oh sorry... The clayface men went away and we had a discussion. Just then an army of clayface people came and shot all the Aborigines except the leader. My leader surrendered.7

16 T oh then your leader surrendered. Oh that's amazing. You had negotiation, a fight then a discussion with your people then your people are killed and then as a result, because you're killed, your people are all....the leader surrenders. They've got a whole cycle ending up in ah...

17 Ben surrender

18 T surrender and in, ah, defeat. Very interesting cycle you've got there.

This stage of the lesson allows Liz to gain insight into the thinking of the children. There is no set goal here in terms of the correct answers and so she is able to respond to the children's contributions in a thoughtful way. In line 5 she asks for clarification from Ali and in line 8 makes an observation about the outcome of Ali and Ben's scenario. In line 19 Liz reformulates Maggie and Kim's scenario for them, and the class, and in line 24 offers the comment "Very interesting cycle you've got there".

What struck me as significant in many of Liz's reactions and comments in regard to the children's contributions was her clear signalling of authentic interest. We had talked about such things as circles for whole class talk, and at other times we were flexible as to where and how children chose to locate themselves during talking sessions. After watching the videos together two aspects of communication in these whole class talk sessions stood out. The first was body language. When Liz was listening to the contributions of the children she would

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7 Kim is learning English as an additional language and had asked Liz earlier (Transcript 3) what 'surrender' meant. Task rehearsal and group/pair work provide opportunities for vocabulary recycling/repetition which is vital for bilingual students – especially English words of Latin and Greek origin. Note too the added repetition from both Ben (line 23) and Liz (line 24).
frequently lean forward making eye contact and often, when a child offered something novel or unexpected, she would look up and away and then return her gaze to the child. This thoughtful looking away was usually accompanied by a continuative such as ‘oh’ or ‘I see’, which in turn was followed by a question which gave the floor back to the child beginning frequently with “so are you saying….” which was one of our pre-conceived action strategies.

Lesson stage 6
In the lesson sequence Liz now moves to introduce the central focus which is the reaction of the Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy. The text about Pemulwuy and his reaction to the British arrival was on audio tape. After listening, Liz highlights the issue of guerilla war.

Transcript 11
1 T that kind of war... what's special about it Luke?
2 Luke I've got a game it's a stealing game, you steal, then you run or sometimes you steal a car get out of the car and run away
3 T OK so...
4 Luke fight then you go back and hide
5 T That's right fight and hide. And could...why, why did that particularly... why's that particularly upsetting for the white settlers. What was the problem for them with that kind of warfare? Khalida?
6 Khalida They didn't have anywhere to go
7 T They didn't have anywhere to go. They had their farms... I suppose they didn't have anywhere to go, but what was so... did they go to the battle and line up against each other?
8 Ss no
9 T what was their problem Fateema?
10 Fateema They couldn't feel safe because they didn't know that the Aborigines were coming
11 T They didn't know when, that's right They didn't know when Aborigines would suddenly come on their land so that kind of warfare is special

In this section of the overall lesson talk, the issue is less about speculation and interpretation, and more about dealing with the factual nature of guerilla war. Liz uses the more familiar IRF pattern – asking questions as the primary knower (K1) - to bring into the shared domain aspects of guerilla war. There is still the familiar repetition of answer which facilitates this public sharing, but there is no seeking to clarify since a specific answer is being sought – a kind of listening review.

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8 See Forrester (1996) for a broad perspectives on body language and communication and Crowder (1996); Wells (2000b; 2001); Johnston and Buzzelli (2002) for an exploration of body language and communication in primary classrooms.
Thoughtfulness on Liz’s part is still evident even in this context. In line 9, in response to Khalida’s point that the settlers had nowhere to go, Liz repeats the response, ponders what has been said “They had their farms... I suppose they didn’t have anywhere to go”, and then provides some further information to prompt further responses.

Lesson stage 7

In this next stage Liz hands out the text which the children had just heard on tape and they proceed to read along as they listen again. After the reading, she focuses their attention on the nature of the text itself.

Transcript 12

1. T [holding up text and pointing] why is there three that are in italics and indented in the page? Why is there three parts that have... that have that different kind of writing?
2. Salam They’re the ones that have been said, like the words that have been said...
3. T by another...
4. Salam person
5. Ss person
6. T by another person. That first lot that’s indented who wrote that?
7. Ss (.....)
8. T it says in brackets at the end of the indented part. Who wrote that? Hai?
9. Hai Watkin Tench
10. T Good. And when did he write that?
11. Hai 1788
12. T He was there... he went on that hunt to look for Pemulwuy. He wrote that really in 1788.

The interaction here resembles that in Transcript 11 and while it exhibits features of the restricted IRF pattern of exchange, it is, in the context of the overall lesson, a case of the teacher drawing upon ‘educational’ discourse (Mercer, 1995) to get particular jobs done. In the case of Lesson stage 6, the job was to review what the children had heard in relation to guerilla war and in the process check understanding, and in Lesson stage 7 the job was to both check on understanding and in the process focus the class on the features of the particular written genre under consideration. But even in this context there is room for excursions away from this core purpose:

Transcript 13

1. T He wrote a diary and all of this [pointing to an italicised section of the text the children have in front of them] is really his words from 1788.
2. S wow!
4 T and they’ve made it into a book now for people to read so he actually went with
5 them...Seargent and two convicts and that’s what he was told to do [referring to text]
6 he was told [reading] kill ten people get two natives as prisoners and they gave him
7 some bags to put people’s heads in who they’d killed
8 Hassan why?
9 S ah yuk!
10 T to prove that they had killed some Aborigines
11 Liam but it would start to stink!
12 Hassan If you (....)
13 S (.....)
14 S (.....)
15 T Hassan?
16 Hassan But if they want to prove it why don’t they just um like get a like, um, get something
17 else like their hands not their head
18 T I don’t know Hassan, but that’s what they did
19 S maybe their hands (....)
20 Hassan but their hands would be better. If you do it with the head...
20 T it could be anyone’s hand
21 Hassan it’s too cruel
22 T well the head kills them
23 S and the hand kills them as well
24 Liam no it doesn’t
25 Ben no it doesn’t
26 T maybe that’s the point Hassan, maybe they wanted to show how cruel...
27 Liam but the hand (....)
28 T they could be...
29 Liam no but they wouldn’t. How could you tell who it was with just the hand?
30 S (.....)
31 Hassan but how did they...
32 Liam if they killed an Aborigine, they all have like black hands.

This is certainly not the benign history of this country to which earlier generations of school children were introduced. Little wonder the fact that heads were severed prompts a reaction that moves the talk away from the teacher towards assertions and counter assertions on the part of the children.

Lesson stage 8
The children’s task is now to design a consequence chart from the Pemulwuy text. Our intention here was to provide the children with another proforma and do the first few actions and reactions with them before they went into their pairs to complete the chart themselves. Like the previous two stages, this stage begins
with Liz asking questions that alert the children to the specifics of the text in front of them.

Transcript 14
1 Sian Pemulwuy spears John McIntrye
2 T John McIntrye, Governor Phillip’s gamekeeper. OK so what would be the first thing
3 you would write? You would say Pemulwuy, you could just put ‘P’, Pemulwuy spears
4 John McIntrye then an arrow. What is the reaction of the whites? Read down and tell me what do Governor Phillip what does Governor Phillip or the whites do in reaction
5 as a consequence of Pemulwuy’s spearing?
6 Ss (…..)
7 T Fateema?
8 Fateema he orders a punitive expedition
9 T he ordered a punitive expedition
10 Aziz it means he punishes any Aborigines that goes in their area
11 T yeah so he...what did he tell them to do?
12 Hai to chop their heads off
13 T yeah to go and what’s that order [pointing to the text] what does he tell them ... Governor
14 Luke capture two men and to kill ten other people
15 T and to kill ten people

Educational discourse is again being used as a focussing and alerting tool, as well as a tool for joint work. While there are again repetitions and a push for accuracy, there is no need for praise in Liz’s follow-up moves. At one point however, Sian raises an issue:

Transcript 15
1 Sian but Miss (…..)
2 T yeah so what do you think about that?
3 Ss (…..)
4 T Yeah that’s right so who’s got a comment? I’m interested in what Sian said that
5 Pemulwuy wasn’t killed for it
6 Sian why didn’t they just kill Pemulwuy instead of killing innocent people that didn’t have anything to do with it
7 T yeah why didn’t they?
8 Eugenia (…..)
9 T oh so you think they were trying to find a way to kill Pemulwuy by killing all the others?
10 Eugenia yeah
Sian knows she can take the floor (line 1) and Liz takes her point and asks the class for their opinions. Unfortunately, some of this talk was inaudible but from Liz’s comment in line 4 and Sian’s later expansion in line 6, we can see that Sian queries the fact that while Pemulwuy had killed John McIntrye, others were to be punished for the crime. In line 8 Liz relays Sian’s question to the class. From Liz’s response in line 10 it is clear that Eugenia has suggested some plan on the part of the British. Here also is an example of the children and the teacher negotiating questions as evidenced by Liz having no idea as to what Eugenia’s point would be before she makes it which is in contrast to the usual nature of educational discourse. She signals this with the continuative ‘oh’ but then makes the pedagogical move simultaneously asking for clarification and reformulating Eugenia’s contribution.

Liz asks for viewpoints and in the process is interrupted by an assertion from Sian. Her short response of “why not” gives the floor back to Sian. In line 18 Liz pushes Sian to consider the issue of Phillip having a plan, linking this to Eugenia’s original point. Sian seems to move in this direction using the word ‘jealous’ to which, amidst contributions from Aziz, Ali and James, Liz assists Sian in the accuracy of her vocabulary choice.

Sometimes when moving into the territory of educated discourse the children found themselves in a kind of linguistic tangle that from our perspective was a sign of grappling with both complex ideas and the language needed to express them. Just after the above interaction Liam has his hand up:

Transcript 16

1  T  Liam?
2  Liam  they think, they might think that he’s come back for revenge, to make ... so they could
3  make it fair numbers
fair numbers

T I don’t quite understand

Liam so like, um, if they kill too many people from Pemulwuy’s tribe

well then he or she

would probably come back for revenge

T that Pemulwuy would come back for revenge

Liam yeah

T But why would Governor Phillip want more Aborigines to come

for revenge?

Liam he… or just Pemulwuy, or, yeah because they might outnumber

them because maybe

they go… go… when they think they might get used to when

they come at night and then

they get more than that number of people or just get all their

troops and then just kill …

Pemulwuy

T so you think it was like kind of a trap to get Pemulwuy to come

out

Liam yeah

T oh! someone else got an idea what was Governor Phillip thinking

by sending a punitive

expedition out

It is somewhat unclear as to just exactly what Liam is getting at here as is

evidenced by a classmate’s correction in line 4. Liz acknowledges the fact that she

is a little confused – “I don’t quite understand” – which gives the floor back to Liam

who continues and his point is ‘mirrored’ by Liz’s repetition. Liam agrees with her

interpretation. The next move by Liz (line 10) says very clearly that she has both

listened and takes Liam’s point seriously as she ratchets up the demand for

thinking. Here Liam gets a little lost but Liz, who is listening intently, reformulates

and gives the floor back to Liam who accepts the reformulation.

At another point in this section of talk, Made makes the following point:

Transcript 17

Made Pemulwuy (…) all the warriors. Like maybe Pemulwuy might like

surrender because

he has no more warriors to fight with

T oh so you think that Governor Phillip might think we’ll just wipe

them out and then

Pemulwuy will be forced to surrender because he…

Made yeah

T oh that’s an interesting idea. So you think Governor Phillip might

be thinking well let’s

just wipe out all the Aborigines around here. Who’s got a view

about that?
Sian, who is passionately arguing the fact that it’s just unfair, says: “It’s a stupid thing to do anyway. It’s just a stupid thing to think of because it’s not doing anything to Pemulwuy. What if he doesn’t surrender?” and Liz responds:

Transcript 18
1 T but Sian listen to what Made’s saying. Made’s saying Governor Phillip had another
2 plan which wasn’t just to kill Pemulwuy but to kill the whole tribe
3 Sian I know but it’s like it’s totally unfair if Pemulwuy did something and… and then he’s
4 punishing all these other people that had… didn’t even know what was going on
5 T but is Governor Phillip thinking about… what’s Governor Phillip thinking? Is he
6 thinking…
7 S (.....)
8 T about fairness? What’s…
9 S (.....)
10 T Governor Phillip perhaps interested in… James?
11 James well if… see if he killed… if he killed (.....) a couple of other people then it would be
12 then… then it would be easier for, for Phillip to sort of take over
13 Aziz Yeah because he (.....)
14 James it would be easier for him to kill Pemulwuy
15 Aziz they’d be outnumbered
16 James and there’d be less people for him to fight with
17 T so you think it was actually a strategy on his part to try and control that area
18 James yeah
19 Aziz yeah

Once again, Liz links the point to its contributor (in this case Made) and challenges Sian to think about Made’s point. Sian persists with her position. Liz widens the scope here a little and pushes the group’s thinking towards Phillip’s possible motivation for punitive expeditions. James and Aziz contribute jointly (lines 11-16 / lines 18-19) while in line 17 we see another example of reformulation with the introduction of the term ‘strategy’.

Lesson stage 9
The children proceeded to complete their consequence charts from the Pemulwuy text. The next day these charts were reviewed. After some general observations on the completed charts Liz asked the class why the British were particularly interested in capturing Pemulwuy, and then sending his head back to England.

Transcript 19
1 T I mean were they particularly interested in capturing Pemulwuy?
2 Aziz Yep
4 Well why? Why were they interested in capturing that particular Aboriginal person?

5 Erdem was sort of very...why do you think [puzzled look/arms out with upraised palms] Sian?

7 um because he (....) for twelve years and (....) killed them (....)

8 Yeah [pointing to Sian] she's saying he fought for twelve years. Anyone got something to add to that? Why did they particularly want proof of his death? What do you think James?

12 because he was outlawed under British law

13 T yes he was outlawed for his...

15 Yeah that's right he was

16 Ben and Miss to remember the people who fought against Pemulwuy

17 T oh as a sort of commemorative thing

Not long after Ben’s contribution, Craig (who had been away the day before) suggests that Pemulwuy was sought after because he was a famous person who “fought many famous battles”.

Transcript 20

1 T like Craig’s used the British word battle and what was special about the kind of battle

2 that was going on around the Sydney area? What kinds of battles were they?

[Made turns to Fateema and whispers ‘guerilla war’]

[Stacy whispers ‘guerilla war’ to Khalida]

3 well like he led, he gathered up troops, like he gathered up different, other warriors

4 from other tribes to fight against the British...

5 Luke and like ‘cause when he died he led the all the warriors who attacked the place and then

6 all of them died

7 (....)
what was different about the British kind of battle...

Made’s and Stacy’s whispers are puzzling given that in other sessions of whole class talk of this nature they participated in often substantial ways. We had no immediate answer for this reaction. But the issue of the lack of vocal participation in whole class talk by quite a few of the children in the class prompted us to pursue, not just a range of small group tasks, but also smaller groupings where substantive conversations might better take place. We considered a number of factors here, including the degree to which the boys were more vocal than the girls -though not always - and the opportunity for the bilingual students (boys and girls) who had levels of English which suggested they could participate, but for some reason did so minimally.

Transcript 21 begins with Liz raising the issue of the kinds of battles with which the British were familiar. This returned the class to previous work they had done on Aboriginal ways of fighting. The issue arose as to who would be advantaged and disadvantaged in particular kinds of battles.

Transcript 21

1  T Maggie’s saying it would be a disadvantage for the Aborigines to fight in that way.
2  Who else thinks...what would be the disadvantage? What do you think Erdem?
3  Erdem well the Aborigines have spears and they have guns
4  T and so...
5  Ss [students, including Erdem, start to talk amongst themselves as to the use of muskets]
6  T OK but Erdem you’re saying when the two are lined up the musket would be um a
    stronger weapon perhaps
8  Erdem yep
9  Ss (.....)
10 T it would be a disadvantage to be lined up. Who else can give us another reason why it
11 might be a challenge? What are you thinking Salam?
12 Salam well I think it’s a disadvantage for the whites because for the muskets um they have to put the musket balls like one, for, just to shoot one Aborigine You’d probably need more so if you like shoot this one then you can shoot the next one so you couldn’t have like more than one musket balls in the musket
17 T so...
18 Salam ‘cause you have to have one musket ball
19 T so you’re saying that it could have been good for the Aborigines to have that kind
20 Salam yeah
21 T of fight
22 Ss [discussion across room on the issue]
23 T Fateema?
Fateema: It could be a disadvantage because um, like Erdem said, um, the Aborigines have um spears and like other things and the white people have guns and the guns like, they’re pretty quick to shoot, and um ‘cause... they would have got them loaded and everything ready before the, the fight begun battle begun and with the surprise one um it could be good, it could be good for the Aborigines because um like when the white people, when they sneak up to the white people, the white people wouldn’t know they’re coming and they could kill (.....).

T: so you think there was an advantage in surprise...

Fateema: Yeah (.....)

Ss: (.....)

T: in the guerilla warfare. Um think about there’s another thing you need to think about and (.....)

Ss: (.....)

ah Sian?

Sian: it’s like (.....) only I think in the um traditional way where they lined up, it’s a dis... it’s an advantage for the white men and a disadvantage for the Aborigines because like they could all have their muskets ready and one could shoot and then the other could shoot, and then the other could shoot, and they could do it really fast.

T: so you think (.....)

Ss: [talk again amongst class]

Sian: because while the other person’s shooting they put the other one in and go again really fast instead of spears they’ve got (.....)

Ss: (.....)

T: hang on. Rajiv?

Rajiv: I don’t agree with Sian because what about you know how the Aborigines have spear spears like if the person is putting the musket ball in the musket an Aboriginal person can throw the spear

Sian: (.....) when they’re already shooting so they think they might get killed so they go [mimes fear]

T: Aziz?

Aziz: um it was like it’s just like (.....) like Mr Dufficy said um when they can shoot once and then it takes around one minute to put the musket balls in and the Aborigines could have thrown like ten spears already

Ss: (.....)
60  T  ah Luke?
61  Luke  it's an advantage for everyone um the whites because in you
know how in the rules it
62  says you can't fire when someone is bending down to get the
weapons ready
63  T  you mean in the Aboriginal law
64  Luke  in Aboriginal law it was um unequal you (....) the people would
both, if you broke
65  the rules both um teams would go and shoot the person if you
broke the rules
66  T  I see so if they have those sort of rules...
67  Ss  (....)
historical discourse (Northedge, 2002) – carries with it features which stand in stark contrast to traditional patterns of classroom talk. These features include:

- extended contributions by the children;
- relatively equal contributions in terms of quantity of talk from the teacher and the children;
- opportunities for children to initiate;
- contingent intervention by the teacher and in the process, moves by the teacher to elaborate upon contributions to introduce more sophisticated / technical language / give the floor back to the child;
- viewpoint identification on the part of both teacher and children;
- extensive and varied use of Thematic resources by the children;
  - personal information questions;
  - negotiated information questions;
  - known information questions on the part of the teacher.

‘Conversaction’

In the analysis of our whole class talks (in particular those of a substantive nature), the issue of participation was of special interest. After our reviewing the transcripts of these interactions, Liz made the point that there appeared to be four different planes of participation. On one plane were the children comfortable and confident in their participation. On another plane was a larger group – less confident, though becoming more adept in such situations. A further plane was less numerous and included children who seemed capable of participation yet for some reason usually chose not to. On the final plane were children who, over the course of our action, rarely or never participated publicly in whole class talks of an educated nature.

As Rymes and Pash (2001) have pointed out, in whole class talk of a restrictive IRE/F kind, children learning English as an additional language can quite easily pass as one of the ‘knowing’ group because they are able to track the answers of classmates around them. In fact, this is a powerful pedagogical argument against a steady diet of restrictive classroom communication – it is easy to learn the game because in the initial stages you can play by following and echoing those about you, and once you know the rules you are normally only asked for factual recall. In the model of assistance I am using here, children in this situation are severely restricted in terms of both role, and tool use (recall). As a consequence, whole class talk of a restricted kind inevitably gives teachers little insight into language development and virtually no insight into thinking. Engaging in educated discourse, however, cannot be so easily camouflaged and for this reason there were identifiable planes of differential participation.

But whole class talk is not just for teachers to gain insight - it serves to give opportunities for children to develop the skills of thinking and talking, or as Skidmore (2000) has put it in relation to whole class talk of a dialogic kind, “the process is the product” (p.294, emphasis in the original). In other words, there is a much wider use of the language tool that is linked to a wider diversity of roles. And so, with the planes of participation we found, we set about developing other contexts – providing assistance - where the less practiced children might get the
space to expand their dialogic experience. This frequently took place when we had the support of another teacher (usually the Support Teacher Learning Difficulties or the ESL teacher) or parent in the room. On these occasions we divided the class into groups to talk about texts we were going to read together. These talking times before the reading of content texts served to make links to the children’s funds of knowledge as well as to give outlines of the texts to be read. And they also served to give some of the children, not yet comfortable with talk in larger groups, the opportunity to participate.

When we talked with the whole class we were conscious of the fact that our simultaneous task was to use the “tool-kit of discourse” (Wells, 1999) to get things done, as well as give the children opportunities to explore the contents of the tool-kit itself. The whole class talk I have described as a series of episodes across an unfolding lesson had as its productive goal the writing of a consequence chart. The process goal was to give the children the space and opportunity to chance their arm and engage in educated discourse along the way.

We tried to assist their performance in this kind of “unrehearsed intellectual endeavour” (Oakshott cited by Edwards & Westgate, 1994, p.47) in a range of different ways. Probably the most obvious was the spatial organisation of talk and its potential to facilitate dialogue. To this end we would frequently sit in a circle on the floor. In fact, we were not particularly concerned with how this circle took shape and often some children would use a chair or, as James sometimes did, squat on a desk somewhat away from the group. In fact, over the course of the Unit Liz used this arrangement at other times including on one occasion when a playground dispute had boiled over in relation to umpiring in cricket (particularly LBW decisions!).

So, it seems to me that the likelihood of substantive conversations taking place in whole class talk relies crucially upon the disposition taken up by the teacher in relation to both knowledge and the viewpoints or understandings of the children. This disposition involves, among other things:

- a willingness on our part to admit ignorance when it really is the case;
- the showing of uncertainty;
- the involvement in joint construction of knowledge – factual or interpretative;
- the recognition of viewpoint ownership and the placement of it in the public domain for the children to deal with;
- the confidence in letting the children to control the conversation (handover);
- a willingness to authentically engage with the viewpoints being put forward through clarification and extension moves;

and as part of this authentic engagement,
- the giving of respect to children’s viewpoints by challenge.

The knowledge building and sharing of our action in this multilingual Year 3/4 class do not point to a radical change in practice. There is no suggestion here that
one practice is necessarily better than another. Rather our understandings are more that effective practice is a principled, contingent response to the teaching and learning goals of the moment, the lesson, and the topic at hand. Our action does suggest however, that a classroom, even in times of considerable outside influence that seeks to constrain teachers’ work, can still be a site for equitable, productive practices of education. A place where teachers can work together with children to assist their passage into the culture which will, in turn, benefit from their presence.

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